

Promising Practice: CNA Training Program with an Educational Advancement Option

Cook Inlet Tribal Council

CITC Healthcare Training

In its Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) project, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, the Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) has successfully implemented a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training program that includes an option for educational advancement through the project's Career Ladder track. It has enabled the project to be successful in transitioning students from graduation at Alaska Vocational Technical Education Center (AVTEC) with their CNA certificates and state licensure into full admission at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) to complete the 24 credits of prerequisites they need to return to AVTEC for the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) and Registered Nurse (RN) classes.

During this transition to the bigger university campus, students were sometimes frustrated with the admission and registration processes. CITC tried to assist students with online applications and the registration process, but due to time constraints and the number of students needing assistance, the coordinator was spread very thin. She was unable to help every student enrolled in the Career Ladder program, which left some students having to navigate the system alone.

In staff discussions with the students, it was suggested that the project invite all its UAA nursing students to meet together with the goal of demystifying the transition from a small campus to the largest college campus in Alaska so that students could meet each other and create a peer networking support system. It was decided the best time to hold this meeting, for the most student involvement, would be during spring break when classes were on break and some students had free days from work. Incorporating CITC's Native traditions, the project decided to hold a potluck and have no set agenda.

Half of the HPOG project's UAA students showed up with delicious homemade food, and the other students called and could not make it since they had to work that day. Everyone helped set up the potluck and the tables and, complimenting each other on the dishes they brought and sharing recipes, they started to get to know each other. Once everyone was settled in, they went around and formally introduced themselves and shared what classes they were in and where in the Career Ladder they placed. The LPN and RN students who were already at AVTEC and had finished the UAA prerequisites were also invited. Students began asking each other about all kinds of things, from how they first applied for admission online, to where they parked, to how they handled classes they were finding difficult. They even discussed how they balanced school and work and what to expect when taking the NCLEX (National Council Licensure Examination) LPN state licensing exam.

Students talked about their plans to transition from the Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in RN to the Bachelor of Science (BS) in RN and when they should apply to the UAA

School of Nursing so that, when they return to UAA with their AAS degrees, they are no longer on the UAA waiting list for admission to the Nursing Program.

Due to the high success rate and interaction among the students, project staff planned another meeting in May, after the term is over, so that students can celebrate a successful semester at UAA with each other and their families at the park. This gathering will also begin introducing new CNA Career Ladder students to those who already have more experience so their journey in healthcare training will be less intimidating. The hope is that these network and support systems will last beyond the years of the HPOG grant.